

Case Study

Alaska State Ombudsman

Time to Close Cases is Reduced From
More Than a Year to Two Months

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Kate Burkhart
Alaska State Ombudsman



Project Overview

Time to Close Cases is Reduced From More Than a Year to Two Months

Alaska State Ombudsman streamlines investigations and reduced bottlenecks using Case IQ software.

The Challenge

Until 2019, the Alaska State Ombudsman was using a custom-built system that had been implemented in the 90s. The system was unreliable and crashed often and there were no tools to monitor workflow, caseloads or bottlenecks. The system lacked an effective search function, and there weren't enough fields to collect the required information. The IT department was spending far too much time on support and maintenance on this legacy system.

The Solution

The Ombudsman needed an efficient, secure case management solution to manage complaints but also as a way to supervise and manage the workflow of her team in real time. The agency needed a secure system, to be compliant with their high confidentiality standard, and able to meet the requirement for a robust reporting system.

The solution also had to be intuitive, so that new staff could be onboarded quickly, with little training and efficient, to ensure investigators could continue with their daily tasks without waiting for the Ombudsman's input.

Where their in-house system fell short:

Unreliable and crashed often.

No tools to monitor workflow or bottlenecks.

Reporting was limited.

IT Department was spending far too much time on support and maintenance.

An Aging System Creating Months-Long Delays

The Alaska Legislature established the Alaska State Ombudsman in 1975. Its mission is to investigate citizen complaints about administrative acts of state agencies and determine appropriate remedies. It is a non-partisan and independent organization.

As part of its Strategic Plan 2017-2022, the Ombudsman set a goal to conduct efficient and effective investigations that are completed and reported promptly. This included a strategy that the Ombudsman source and implement a case management system to support investigations and workflow.

Until 2019, the Alaska State Ombudsman was using a custom-built system that had been implemented in the 90s. Over time, the system had become unreliable. Frequent crashes meant the team couldn't be confident that their work would be saved.

The existing system offered no tools to monitor workflow, case loads, or bottlenecks in the investigation process. There wasn't an effective search function, and a limited number of fields was available for collecting information.

Reporting capacity was limited. There was no mechanism to build custom reports. Standard report results had become inconsistent. "I would run the same report with the same parameters on the same morning and get different results," said Kate Burkhart, the Alaska State Ombudsman.

The old system was static and could not keep pace with Windows. "Every time we would install a Windows update, we would break something," said Burkhart. "Then our IT department would have to use chicken wire and duct tape to put it back together. There was always the fear that this would be the one that would break it permanently.

"Our IT staff were spending mountains of time on support and maintenance, way beyond what could be expected of them."

-Kate Burkhart,
the Alaska State
Ombudsman

An Efficient, Secure Case Management Solution to Facilitate a Quicker Response

“When I took office, we were reasonably and justifiably criticized for being slow. In our strategic plan we set ourselves a benchmark of closing all complaints and investigations within 12 months of receipt,” explained Burkhart.

The Ombudsman needed an efficient, secure case management solution to manage complaints but also as a way to supervise and manage the workflow of her team in real time. Additional functions to perform quality assurance were also important.

“I try to maintain a team of highly competent people,” said Burkhart. “My preference is to give staff the tools they need to do the work as well as possible and then monitor from 10,000 feet.”

A robust case management platform would allow investigators to get on with their daily tasks, while providing a mechanism for the Ombudsman to monitor workflow and performance.

The Alaska State Ombudsman needed a system that was:

- Secure, to be compliant with the agency’s high confidentiality standard;
- Intuitive, so that new staff could be onboarded quickly, with little training;
- Configurable, to match the agency’s work processes;
- Able to meet the requirement for a robust reporting system; and
- Flexible, to allow more than one investigator to be assigned to a case.

Through a competitive procurement process, the Ombudsman chose Case IQ.

“A tight RFP and working with a consultant and IT experts to make sure the bids were responsive helped us ensure that we got a good vendor in the end,” said Burkhart, noting that Case IQ’s pricing was transparent from the beginning, and didn’t have to be revised, which she considered to be a good sign.

“We needed something that would help streamline the processes that investigators use, but also address where the bottleneck in our process really is: with final review by the Ombudsman herself.”

-Kate Burkhart,
the Alaska State
Ombudsman

Case Closing Times Reduce From Years to Just Two Months

Six months after implementing Case IQ, the Alaska State Ombudsman reports that 94 percent of complaints received since the day Case IQ went live have been reviewed and closed within 60 days. This is due in large part to a streamlined workflow and a reliable platform that's accessible from anywhere at any time.

The intake team enters new case information into Case IQ as complaints are received. Cases can be stored for the regular weekly review or flagged with a to-do for the Ombudsman to review immediately. The Ombudsman can then escalate the case or return it to the queue for regular review.

Once a case is assigned, the investigator follows the workflow in Case IQ, uploading case notes and evidence files as they go. For work processes that require review of correspondence, the investigator creates a to-do to alert a peer or the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can view cases and monitor case activity and progress.

"I can see what's going on. If things need to be fixed or updated I can either do that or use the to-do function to make sure it gets done," said Burkhart.

Accessing Case IQ remotely helps investigations stay on track and prevents delays when someone is out of the office. "When we send a team to do outreach in rural communities in Alaska, they can take a laptop, log in, and enter new complaints — maybe even resolve complaints — all from a remote location," says Burkhart.

With secure access roles, there's no danger of exposing information to unauthorized people. "Alaska is a small state and it's not unusual for us to have conflicts, either professionally or personally, with a complaint," explained Burkhart. "It's been really easy for me to be able to deny access when there is a conflict of interest, so that we ensure that all complaints are reviewed objectively."

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The Result

Case IQ's user-friendly interface has resulted in high adoption rates and fast onboarding. "We hired a new intake person in June, so she had no involvement with Case IQ before go-live, and she was a master user just four months in," said Burkhart.

The case-linking feature saves the team hours of time and effort. When a complainant is linked to more than one complaint, all the cases can be linked. And when a grievance is filed about a previous decision, the case can be reviewed with a few clicks.

The business analytics (Yellowfin) was a big draw, because it provides a comprehensive reporting function. "It provides so much reporting capacity, it is a little daunting once you start using it. We're slowly but surely learning the basics, and we get additional training as we go. We should be confident in all the report functions within 12 months of implementation," said Burkhart.

Great case management tool

"Our contractor, who is part of a software consulting and development company, said that he had never worked with a better company. We had no barriers... and there was no over-promising. From soup to nuts the entire experience was great."

-Kate Burkhart,
the Alaska State Ombudsman

Investigate and Prevent Workplace Misconduct with Case IQ

Case IQ helps you investigate, prevent and protect your company from fraud, harassment and compliance lapses to lower risk for your organization.

Find out more about how Case IQ can help your team conduct more effective investigations and prevent ethics and compliance lapses.

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